



# What if... every child was **in the picture?**

CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS: THE CASE FOR INVESTMENT





# To make people count, you first need to count people

Around the world, almost 230 million children under the age of five are effectively invisible because they haven't had their births registered. That's almost four times the population of the United Kingdom. Sub-Saharan Africa is home to 85 million of these children, while 135 million live in Asia and the Pacific.

Despite the potential benefits, more than 100 developing countries still don't have functioning systems that can support efficient registrations of births.

Unless this issue receives immediate and concerted attention by governments, donors and development partners, the continued cost of neglect of these systems could detract from both human and economic development.

## What is civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS)?

Civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) – **the acts of recording and documenting vital events in a person's life (birth, marriage, divorce, adoption, death)** – fall under the responsibility of a number of government ministries and departments, such as the ministries of health, interior and justice, as well as national statistics offices.

Civil registration helps strengthen public administration and governance by giving individuals a legal identity and civil status and by generating information that feeds into civil registries and population databases.

The information governments collect gives a vibrant insight into the demographics and health of a population. Reliable data on births, deaths and fertility informs population estimates that make policy-making and long-term national planning easier and more effective.

Optimal coordination and communication form the backbone of any successful CRVS system while timely and accurate reporting enhances the credibility of administrators and their capacity to deliver services by helping them to identify what services are needed.

*“If you are registered you have a legal identity. You can prove who and how old you are. Your government knows you exist and can plan for your present and future needs. Children who do not have their births registered are often among the poorest and most marginalised in society. Without a legal identity, those children are less likely to overcome social, economic and political barriers. Civil registration helps protect and empower them.”*

**Nigel Chapman, CEO Plan International**

*“Failure to establish fair and inclusive processes for civil registration is leaving millions without an official identity.”*

**Kate Gilmore, Assistant-Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director of UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund**

*“CRVS systems are a fundamental function of government. The registration of births, adoptions, marriages, divorces and deaths is necessary for safeguarding the human, legal, economic, social, cultural and democratic rights to which every person is entitled.”*

**Shun-ichi Murata, Deputy Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)**

## Why is CRVS important?

Civil registration provides individuals with the documentary evidence often required to secure recognition of their legal identity, their family relationships, their nationality and their ensuing rights, such as to inheritance. With a legal identity, an individual will usually find it easier to access essential services such as healthcare, education and social welfare. That individual will also be in a much better position to vote, own property, open a bank account, access credit, find formal work, and get an ID card, passport and driving licence.

It is the undeniable right of every child to have his or her birth registered, as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Governments are obligated to register all births so that children can grow up protected and empowered.

Vital statistics significantly contribute to the formulation of successful policies across multiple sectors – a key requisite for sustainable development, efficient resource allocation, and accurate monitoring and evaluation.

Unlike other sources of statistics, such as censuses and household surveys, the data garnered by civil registration systems gives real-time, continuous information about population dynamics and health indicators at the local and national level.

*“CRVS systems not only provide the fundamental information necessary to monitor progress with several development goals, they provide the formal accountability framework against which the progress of nations can be measured...”*

**Pali Lehohla, Statistician-General of South Africa and Chair of the Africa Symposium on Statistical Development**

*“The uncomfortable truth is that the international community will not be able to know if true progress is being made because they don’t have the data on births, deaths and causes of deaths.”*

**Jane Thomason, CEO Abt JTA, international health and social sector consultants**

*“The potential to vastly improve the quality and coverage of birth and death registration through technical and strategic innovation ... is enormous and presently unexploited.”*

**Alan Lopez, University of Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, Australia**

*“CRVS systems give benefits that are much broader than the sum of their parts - and the best benefits of a CRVS system come from the system as a whole. The momentum and commitment to improving CRVS systems is strong, with key agencies and partners at country, regional and international level working together in a systemic approach, recognising the broad benefit of CRVS to countries and to international development.”*

**Anneke Schmider, WHO Technical Officer (CRVS), Health Statistics and Information Systems**

## What is Plan calling for?

**Despite the potential benefits, more than 100 developing countries still don’t have well-functioning CRVS systems.**

Plan is therefore calling for greater investment in effective, comprehensive and rights-based systems. Specifically, Plan is calling for:

- **Leadership and political mobilisation** to ensure clear, aligned and integrated responsibilities and accountability between key stakeholders (in particular, relevant government departments). Action should be taken to remove blockages to the effective administration of a CRVS system around which donors and development partners can align their support.
- **A multi sectoral/stakeholder approach** – the collection and use of CRVS information cuts across many sectors. National governments and regional bodies should ensure that planning and coordination between all CRVS stakeholders is carried out in a proactive, inclusive and productive manner.
- **Legal reforms** – where CRVS requires the review or adoption of laws (eg legal provisions for digitalisation), these legal reform processes must respect, protect and fulfil human and children’s rights.
- **Allocation** of resources at global, regional and national levels based around a solid understanding of the financial implications and potential long-term benefits derived from an efficient CRVS system.
- **Embracement** of innovative technology through partnerships with technology providers and the private sector to find solutions that meet the needs of national CRVS systems.
- **Investment** in boosting the capacity of practitioners and systems.
- **Scalability and compatibility** so that data can be gathered using a process and format that is compatible with other national and global systems.
- **Strategic communication** – at global, regional and national levels, investment should be made in strategic communication campaigns to increase knowledge and awareness of CRVS systems (and the potential benefits they could provide).

## **Plan International**

Founded more than 75 years ago, Plan International is one of the oldest and largest children's development organisations in the world. Plan works in 50 countries across Africa, Asia and the Americas to promote child rights and lift millions of children out of poverty. Plan is independent, with no religious, political or governmental affiliations. Since 1996, Plan has supported 30 countries to establish a birth registration system, helped to register 40 million children around the globe and worked with governments to improve birth registration legislation.



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## CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS: THE CASE FOR INVESTMENT

“ I was very scared because there was so much fighting between the prisoners. The guards would beat us too. I was shocked and terrified.”

Shojun, who was jailed in an adult prison when he was 12 years old.

**Officially, the birth registration rate in Bangladesh is 98.5%.<sup>1</sup> But this is the rate for manual registration, which is impossible to verify and highly inaccurate. The figure for births registered digitally and therefore recorded in a central databank is 64%.**

Registration takes place in local government institutions at union parishad/council, municipality, city corporation and cantonment level. Volunteers are appointed to gather background information which is then passed to local government registrars who issue birth certificates. Although birth registration is free for children, some local government institutions and individuals demand money.

1. Government birth registration project

Officially, birth certificates have to be presented to access services such as education and healthcare, to get a job and to register a marriage. Parents sometimes apply for a new birth certificate to change their child's age, for example, when they want their daughter to marry below the legal age of 18.

Children without a birth certificate – especially street children, refugees from Myanmar (Burma) and children from the poorest communities – are at risk of being trafficked to India and the Middle East, arrested and locked up as adults or employed in industries such as the garment industry below the legal age of 18.

## Government initiatives

The 2004 Births and Deaths Registration Act made birth registration compulsory for anyone born in Bangladesh, irrespective of age, race, religion or nationality. Newborn babies must be registered within 45 days after birth. There are penalties for parents who don't register their children within two years. In 2013, the government revised the law, increasing penalties for late registration.

The main focus of the government is now to strengthen the capacity of local government, make technical improvements to the online system and work with civil society to raise awareness locally and nationally.

## Plan International Bangladesh in action

Plan is working to support the implementation of rules and regulations to ensure 100% online birth registration. We've also conducted awareness-raising campaigns via TV, print media and public events.

We supported the government in piloting an online registration system whereby data can be entered remotely – including for Bangladeshis living overseas – and stored centrally. The government is now introducing the system throughout the country.

## The future

Plan aims to support the government in creating an efficient and sustainable CRVS system by:

- raising parents' awareness about the importance of birth registration through print and digital media, and national and local events
- carrying out school-based campaigns promoting registration and explaining how to go about it
- training executives and system operators in registration processes
- scaling up digital and mobile phone registration
- convincing mobile phone operators of the importance of birth registration.

**In order to achieve this we need to raise US\$950,000, which will cover a period of three years.**

**FUNDING NEED  
US\$950,000**



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BENIN



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Edah, 10

## CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS: THE CASE FOR INVESTMENT

“I’m not in school because, without a birth certificate, I wasn’t allowed to sit my exams.”

Rosaline, 15

**The birth registration rate in Benin is 60% – down from 70% in 2006.<sup>1</sup>**

The main obstacle preventing parents registering their children is that, legally and to register their child for free, they have to do it within ten days of their child’s birth. Traditionally, however, babies are not named until eight days after the birth, leaving parents only two days to reach a registration centre. Since each registration centre serves several communities, they are often far away and difficult to reach. There aren’t enough staff, and often they don’t have the necessary forms, leading to long delays and frustration. If parents miss the ten-day deadline, they have to go through a time-consuming court process which can cost up to US\$40 – more than most families can afford.

1. OFFE INFO No.7, September 2013 available at: [www.offebenin.org](http://www.offebenin.org)



Children (especially girls) who are unable to prove their age for lack of a birth certificate are at risk of being married below the legal age, and are vulnerable to sexual abuse or being trafficked. Officially, children need a birth certificate to enrol in school, although this is often overlooked. However, they do need one to sit examinations and move up a grade. It's also impossible to vote, get a passport or obtain credit without a birth certificate.

Registration is lower in the north of the country, particularly among the Fulani people who are nomadic, and in rural areas where there is a lack of awareness about the importance of registration and registration centres are difficult to reach. Girls are also less likely to be registered than boys. In areas where Plan works and has supported birth registration, registration rates are as high as 82 per cent.

**FUNDING NEED  
US\$2 million**



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## Government initiatives

In July 2012, the government held a conference with Plan and other international, national and community organisations to review its civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) policy. Recommendations included extending the registration period and increasing resources to the registration system to make it more responsive. However, these recommendations, including the recommendation to allow more time for registration, have not been implemented.

## Plan in action

Along with other organisations, we helped set up a national forum on the reform of civil registration in Benin. We've also taken mobile cinemas promoting birth registration into different communities, encouraged health workers, civil service leaders, district secretaries and child protection committees to support birth registration, and provided training for registrars. With the Advisory Council of Children and Civil Status Centres, we distributed 10,000 free birth certificates in areas where we work.

## The future

We're continuing to advocate for a change in the law to extend the time limit for registration. We're also seeking funding to:

- improve registration systems and processes, including through the introduction of mobile digital registration services
- continue raising public awareness through mobile cinemas, radio, and community durbars [festivals].

**In order to achieve this, we need to raise US\$2 million, which will cover a five-year period.**

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“My brother went to the council to apply for a job as a cleaner but when the council worker saw that he didn’t have a birth certificate, he refused to engage him. That’s why I try to encourage our parents to provide birth certificates for all the children.”

Noélie Sawadogo, 17, Yimiougou

**Although the birth registration rate in Burkina Faso is officially 65%,<sup>1</sup> there are no reliable data to back up this figure.**

Other estimates put the registration figure much lower, especially in rural areas where registration centres are difficult and sometimes impossible to reach – especially during the long rainy season. Health workers have been trained to register babies born in clinics, but most children in poor rural areas are born at home and therefore unlikely to be registered.

1. Ministry of Territorial Administration, Decentralisation and Security (MATDS)

The cost of registration varies depending on when and where a child is registered. Registration at birth is free, but after two months parents have to pay – officially a standard fee of 600 CFAs (US\$1) but some registrars charge more. Parents also need two witnesses, making the process both costly and time consuming.

Children who are unable to prove their age and identity are vulnerable to being trafficked, having to work in hazardous jobs, such as mining, or forced into early marriage. And, although they do not need a birth certificate to enrol in school or to access healthcare, they do need one to sit national examinations.

**FUNDING NEED  
US\$2 million**

## Government initiatives

In 2012, the government adopted a national action plan (2012–16) which includes measures to introduce free birth registration, build and equip new registration centres, recruit and train new registrars, train mayors, council workers and an archivist, and produce and disseminate public awareness-raising materials.

## Plan in action

In 2009, Plan worked with the Ministry of Territorial Administration, Decentralisation and Security, UNICEF and other partners to:

- raise awareness of the need for and benefits of birth registration
- organise free registration in pilot regions
- provide equipment such as typewriters, computers and registration forms for regional and provincial centres.
- train mayors and registrars
- produce five documentary films and posters to raise public awareness about the importance of birth registration.

Currently, we're working with the government to provide birth certificates to Malian refugee children and local communities in the Sahel area.

## The future

Plan aims to continue supporting the government and other partners in implementing the national action plan. This will include TV and radio public awareness campaigns, equipping registration offices, training staff and increasing digital birth registration through the use of mobile phones.

**In order to achieve this, we need to raise US\$2 million, which will cover a five-year period.**



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### CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS: THE CASE FOR INVESTMENT

In Ethiopia only 10% of children are registered,<sup>1</sup> ranking it lowest in terms of registration rates in the world.

Until recently there was no functioning birth registration legislation or system in the country. But in 2012, the government issued a proclamation making registration compulsory and free at birth. A new Vital Events and Registration Agency will coordinate and monitor implementation of the new law. In order to roll registration out across the regions, the government's strategy and five-year action plan links it with existing structures and services such as local health posts. Actual registration is planned to commence in late 2014.

1. 2012 report of The Ministry of Finance and Economic Development and UNICEF on "Investing on Boys and girls in Ethiopia"

## Plan in action

From 2008–2011, based on a UNICEF initiative, Plan implemented a pilot registration programme in two woredas (districts) in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region (SNNPR). We registered newborn babies and some of their older siblings at local health posts and raised awareness about the importance of registration with parents, health workers and community leaders. We trained health workers and provided materials such as registration forms. As a result, 4,000 children received birth notification cards. The project was implemented in close collaboration with district health bureaux and provided useful information to feed into the national strategy.

## The future

Now the legal framework is in place, there's a huge task to support the government in implementing its five-year action plan. We aim to do this by sharing examples of Plan's good practice in other countries and organising conferences and training for national and regional government officials. We'll also continue to provide technical and financial support so that regional and local registration centres can clear the huge backlog of children needing to be registered and set up sustainable systems. We'll work with local communities and organisations to raise awareness of the importance of registration and develop guidelines, tools and working procedures to improve the registration process. As resources allow, we also aim to support the development of a special registration process for some sectors of society, such as pastoralist communities.

**In order to achieve this we need to raise a minimum of US\$1.5 million, which will cover the five-year period of the government's action plan.**

**FUNDING NEED  
US\$1.5 million**



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HAITI



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## CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS: THE CASE FOR INVESTMENT

With a registration rate of just under 80%,<sup>1</sup> Haiti has one of the lowest registration rates in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Births are registered in one of Haiti's 185 civil registration offices. Although every commune has one, registration centres are few and far between in rural areas, making them difficult and expensive to reach. Hence, registration is lowest among poor people living in rural areas.

Although registration at birth is supposed to be free, in practice registrars in the provinces charge a fee (often about US\$3) because, although they are paid a salary, they have to recover the costs of renting premises, paying for registration equipment and materials such as ledgers, pens and paper, and employing other staff.

Also, many children are registered late, outside the legal timeframe of 25 months. This involves going to court and costs between US\$95 and US\$140, which is more than poor families can afford. It is estimated that the government and legal profession make between US\$6 million and \$9 million per year from late registrations.

1.UNICEF, 2013, State of the World's Children 2013

Many children, but especially those who are unregistered, are at risk of being trafficked into neighbouring Dominican Republic or obliged to work as *restavek* (domestic workers) in the capital Port au Prince and other cities and towns. According to a recent report, Haiti rated second regarding the proportion of the population judged to be in slavery.<sup>2</sup>

## Government initiatives

The region's major investor in civil registration, the Inter American Development Bank, was prepared to support Haiti before the 2010 earthquake, but resources earmarked to modernise the registration system were redirected to the disaster response. Lately, however, the Ministry of Justice, along with the Office of National Identification (ONI) Organization of American States (OAS), UNICEF and Plan have begun discussions to once more raise the profile of this issue and encourage the government to seek funding for a further initiative.

## Plan in action

Plan has been supporting the development of civil registration in Haiti since 2005 when we launched our worldwide Count Every Child campaign. In 2011, we helped organise a regional conference to promote equitable access to birth registration, review achievements and progress made, and identify pending challenges for meeting the regional goal of free, universal and timely birth registration for all of the children of the region by 2015.

## The future

Our aim is to work with UNICEF and other partners to:

- support the Ministry of Justice to streamline the registration system, making it more accessible, especially to the rural poor
- promote greater cooperation and coordination between civil registrars, churches and clinics in rural areas
- explore the potential for digital birth registration with a mobile phone operator, which is interested in promoting birth registration as in order to buy a sim card a customer has to have proof of identity.

<sup>2</sup>Walk Free, Global Slavery Index, October 2013  
<http://www.globalslaveryindex.org/>



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## CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS: THE CASE FOR INVESTMENT

“I dropped out of school and earned my living singing on the streets for a year. I was chased by police and friends were arrested and held in a detention centre because they had no birth certificate. When I went back to school, the teacher told me I needed a birth certificate to take the national examination.”

Ridwan, 16, who finally got a birth certificate with the support of Plan’s partner, the Rumah Kita Foundation

### Just over half the children in Indonesia have a birth certificate.<sup>1</sup>

However, rates vary between urban and rural populations, and between geographical areas. Whereas registration rates in Central Java are 94 per cent, in East Nusa Tenggara, for example, they’re around 20 per cent. A lack of birth certificates and identification papers made it extremely difficult to reunite children separated in the 2006 tsunami in Aceh with their families.

Although registration up to two months after birth is officially free, the process is complicated and time consuming, and parents often have to pay for documents and witnesses at the civil registration office.



It's estimated that only 22% of the 94,000 children living on the streets of Indonesia's urban centres have birth certificates.

## Government initiatives

Plan has worked with the National Commission on Child Protection and the Consortium on Civil Registration to bring about an amendment to the law. Registering a child more than 60 days after its birth is now free and fines for late registration have been removed. State registrars and civil registration officers who fail to provide registration services will now be fined.

## Plan in action

Plan has been working with the government and other partners to improve the legal framework and civil registration policies. At district level, we've focused on simplifying registration and reducing its cost. For example, we supported the government of Sikka District to implement the national guidelines by training 600 midwives, village heads and government officers to carry out registration. Results have been significant, with registration rates in Sikka going up from 3 per cent to 73 per cent.

We've also set up birth registration services in seven sub-districts in East Nusa Tenggara Province and held awareness-raising sessions about the importance of registration and the collection and processing of data to generate vital statistics. In Kebumen and Soe, we've provided birth registration forms and trained midwives and Village Child Protection Committees to register babies.

With a consortium of other NGOs, the government and a private company, we've developed an alternative registration model that makes it easier for street children to register. We've also made recommendations for the revision of the Administration and Population policy, including making registration free for all children under 18 and creating local units to support the district registrar's office. We've established a working group with UNICEF and the World Health Organization to implement the plan of action developed at the 2012 High-Level Meeting on the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific.

## The future

Plan aims to continue supporting local governments to simplify birth registration systems and make them more accessible by, for example, providing guidelines, advocating for increased budget allocation for local birth registration and supporting village governments to promote registration through events and activities. We're training midwives and Village Child Protection Committees to carry out registration and holding workshops and public awareness campaigns to promote registration at birth. We're also designing and testing digital registration.

**In order to achieve this, we need to raise US\$6 million, which will cover a five-year period.**

1. Central Bureau for Statistics (BPS) data 2009

**FUNDING NEED**  
**US\$6 million**



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KENYA



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“With our certificates,  
we’re sure we won’t  
have difficulties taking  
our standard eight exams.”

Loyce, 10, on receiving her birth certificate  
with her twin sister Patience

**The birth registration rate in Kenya  
is 60%.<sup>1</sup>**

Although government policy requires every child to be registered at birth, there’s a big gap between policy and practice. Rural families often have to travel long distances to reach registration centres, and parents have to pay a penalty fee and administration costs for any application submitted six months or more after a child’s birth. The result is that many parents don’t register their children.

1. Kenya Civil Registration Department Strategic Plan 2013

Without a birth certificate, Kenyan children are not able to enrol in school or take state exams. They're also at greater risk of being trafficked, forced into early marriage or sexual slavery, punished as adults if they're convicted of a crime and recruited into armed groups.

## Government initiatives

The 2010 constitution entitles every Kenyan to citizenship and a registration documents but, although the government is currently reviewing legislation and investigating ways to streamline record keeping, the process remains cumbersome and problematic. The legal framework is not properly linked to approved policy and the use of digital technology requires changes in the law.

**FUNDING NEED**  
**US\$1.5 million**

## Plan in action

Plan has undertaken a number of community-based initiatives, such as registration drives, promoting birth registration through health clinics and working with the government to provide services closer to children and their families.

From 2008–2012, our digital birth registration pilot project explored the potential of mobile phones to increase registration in five rural communities in Kwale County. To make registration easier, community-based organisations relayed details of births directly to the Civil Registrar via mobile phone. By the end of the third year, results showed that registration increased in those communities and that mobile phones offer an easily accessible, cheap means of increasing the efficiency and coverage of birth registration services.

## The future

Plan aims to continue supporting the government to strengthen its Civil Registration and Vital Statistics system using our Digital Birth Registration model. We'll work to increase both demand for and access to registration services by advocating for, and directly supporting implementation in eight counties of:

- birth registration at service delivery points such as health centres
- the provision of certificates at schools for children not registered at birth
- the use of digital technology, including mobile phones.

**In order to achieve this, we need US\$1.5 million, which will cover a three-year period.**



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LAOS



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“My husband took the birth certificates I got from the hospital where I gave birth and our family book to the village head, who certified them. Then he went to the district office and my children were recorded in the family book. Of course, it takes a lot of time.”

Dara, a mother living in the capital, Vientiane

**Officially, 75% of children aged under five are registered in Lao PDR.<sup>1</sup>**

However, the actual number of people with a birth certificate is much lower as people are not clear about what constitutes registration of a birth and what counts as a birth certificate.

There is no uniform system and there are no standard forms or certificates for birth and death registration across all provinces. Processes vary between districts, making it hard to achieve a coherent and unified system. In practice, villagers are highly dependent on their village head, local police and hospitals, many of whom have their own systems, ‘certificates’ and forms. There is also no system linking local or district data with the national statistics bureau, so population statistics are mainly based on projections and administrative data from different government ministries.

1. 2011–12 Lao Social Indicators Survey

Many parents are unaware that they must register their child. Even if they know they should, many are confused about how to go about it, or find the process too complicated, too expensive and time-consuming. With 80% of the population and many of the country's 49 ethnic groups living in remote rural areas, getting to the district registration centre is a challenge for many parents, as is communicating with officials in the Lao language.

## Government initiatives

Along with other countries in the region, the government of Lao PDR has committed to establishing a well-functioning CRVS system by 2020. In 2013, it set up an inter-ministerial Citizen Management Steering Committee, led by the Ministry of Home Affairs, to develop an effective CRVS system.

## Plan in action

In 2012, Plan was part of a steering committee, with the Lao Statistics Bureau, UNICEF and other development agencies, which reviewed the current CRVS system and made recommendations about how to increase the level of registration. We're now chairing an informal working group of development partners to support the government in its efforts to increase registration.

## The future

Plan's aim is to support the government to implement its commitments and introduce an inclusive and sustainable national CRVS system by 2020. Specifically it will:

- provide technical support to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) to develop a CRVS strategic plan
- work with MOHA to identify an effective delivery system for civil registration at all levels – national, provincial, district and village
- lead and coordinate the work of development partners through an informal CRVS working group
- explore the potential of digital solutions to optimise birth registration.
- provide training for MOHA staff to enable sustainable, high-quality implementation of the CRVS system.

**In order to achieve this, we need US\$1.9 million, which will cover a three-year period.**

**FUNDING NEED**  
**US\$1.9 million**



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“With a birth certificate I can get social services for my child...”

Idalina Cossa Jose, Jangamo district

**The birth registration rate for children aged less than five years in Mozambique is 48%,<sup>1</sup> but rates vary between regions and between urban and rural areas.**

Various barriers prevent birth registration. Many rural families can't afford the cost of registration or the cost of travel to their local registry office, which is often far away in a town. Many parents aren't aware of the importance of registration, and there are cultural barriers, such as the fact that the father has to be present in order for a family to name a child. The Provincial and District Notary Registration offices, which are responsible for registration, also have limited resources and a lack of trained staff.

1. Demographic and Health Survey, 2011

Although birth registration up to four months is free, in some rural areas registration is still as low as 15% because parents can't afford to travel to the nearest town to register their child.

## Government initiatives

As part of the government's 2006–2010 National Plan of Action, the Ministry of Justice, working with partners including Plan and UNICEF, introduced a birth registration campaign which led to nearly 10 million children under the age of 18 being registered by the end of 2011. In one province, a pilot data collection system has been set up as part of ongoing efforts to create national statistics on birth registration. The government is now concentrating on increasing registration in rural areas by creating local registration agents in consultation with community leaders and service providers, such as health centres.

## Plan in action

Since 2007, Plan has worked with the Department of Registration and Notary in Inhambane province to raise awareness about the importance of registration, register more than 40,000 children, and improve the registration process. As part of the government decentralisation process, we also facilitated the construction of three local birth registration centres, and helped to register an additional 13,500 children.

## The future

Plan's aim is to continue advocating for increased budgetary resources to improve birth registration services and to continue working with local communities, including child protection committees and children's groups, to raise awareness of the importance of birth registration. In collaboration with the government, UNICEF and others, we'll explore new approaches such as using digital technology. We'll also continue to support the government's decentralisation process by facilitating the provision of registration centres at five local administrative centres (localidade) in the two districts where we work.

**In order to achieve this, we need to raise US\$2 million, which will cover a period of five years.**

**FUNDING NEED  
US\$2 million**



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NEPAL



# What if... every child was in the picture?



## CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS: THE CASE FOR INVESTMENT

“From now on, school will not turn us away for not having a certificate. And Dalit [socially excluded] children who are under five who can show their birth certificate can get US\$5 per month to improve their nutrition.”

Anita, chair of the children’s club in the village of Jante, Morang district, where, with Plan’s the support, the village development committee has achieved 100% registration

**The birth registration rate for under-fives in Nepal is 42%,<sup>1</sup>** although it’s lower in the hill areas, where villages are scattered and people have to travel long distances to register their children and in the densely populated plains, where poverty is severe.

The registration rate has gone up in recent years following public awareness campaigns by the government, Plan and UNICEF. The government has also introduced cash incentives to encourage Dalit (socially excluded) communities to register their children.

Registration is carried out by the secretary of each village development committee, but in some areas people often live a long way from a village. Making the journey to register their child is difficult and can be a waste of time if the secretary is away when they visit. Health centres also issue certificates as proof of birth, but these are not officially recognised by the government.

1. 2011 Health and Demographic Survey



Children who cannot prove their age are at greater risk of being forced into early marriage, especially in the plains, where girls are sometimes married as young as 12. They are also vulnerable to being trafficked to work as domestic and sex workers, in India or as porters in restaurants and hotels in Kathmandu and other towns and cities in Nepal.

Registration from birth up to 35 days is free, but from 35 to 75 days it costs 8 rupees, and after 75 days goes up to 50 rupees (US\$0.50). When families have to register four or five children together – because they weren't registered as babies – it is more than many can afford.

**FUNDING NEED  
US\$400,000**

## Government initiatives

Since the 2012 High-Level Meeting on the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, registration has been a priority. The Government is now eager to improve data collection and processing to tackle children's rights violations. It has made 14 April 2014 (Nepal's new year's day) Vital Events Registration Day.

## Plan in action

We're supporting the government to raise public awareness of birth registration among community and religious leaders, health workers and women's and children's groups. We're organising birth registration camps in villages with the lowest registration rates. We've helped develop software so the government can computerise the registration system, as well as providing computers and printers, and training village development committee secretaries to register births digitally in the 13 districts where we work.

## The future

Plan aims to support the government to introduce a digital birth registration solution nationally across the country's 75 districts. We're also aiming to hold birth registration camps in the districts where we work, so that all children in those areas are registered.

**In order to achieve this, we need US\$400,000 which will cover a three-year period.**



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# What if... every child was in the picture?



## CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS: THE CASE FOR INVESTMENT

“Many classmates were unable to take the entrance exam for higher secondary school... Only a few of us were able to apply, just because we have birth certificates.”

Sidra, Gilgit-Baltistan

**The birth registration rate in Pakistan is estimated to be 29.5%.**

However, data is unreliable and there are vast differences between different geographical areas. In some remote mountainous and desert areas such as Gilgit-Baltistan, Balochistan and parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, it's as low as 0–1 per cent. Once every five years the government gathers statistical information but numbers are estimates as data is unreliable.

One of the main reasons for parents not registering their children is that they simply do not see it as necessary and the cost (between US\$2 and \$5) is more than many people can afford. Also, for much of the rural population, registration offices are too far away and difficult to get to.

## Plan in action

Plan has been promoting birth registration since it started working in Pakistan in 1996. We've been advocating for free birth registration and working with the National Database and Registration Authority and regional governments to promote registration. We've carried out public awareness campaigns about the right of every child to a birth certificate, the value of registration in terms of protection from trafficking, early marriage and child labour, and the importance of reliable data in providing accurate statistics.

From 1998 to 2000, PLAN ran a project in North West Frontier province (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) which included a TV and radio campaign informing parents about children's right to registration, and its benefits in terms of protection and access to benefits, employment, passports, etc. It also provided training for thousands of registration staff and provided equipment and materials such as forms, registration forms and posters.

In 2011/13, a second campaign was carried out in seven districts of Gilgit-Baltistan. This included awareness-raising and training government staff to register children using computers. Our aim was to provide government with a cost-effective, efficient and replicable model.

## The future

There are around 83 million children in Pakistan who are not registered. Plan aims to run a national awareness-raising campaign encouraging parents to register their children and highlighting the need for civil registration among national and regional officials. We will also train and support 7,000 registration staff, advocate for regional governments to allocate sufficient funds for birth registration, and assist them in amending the law, reducing fees and simplifying birth registration processes, including implementation of a Digital Birth Registration programme.

**In order to achieve this, we need US\$7 million, which will cover a three-year period.**

**FUNDING NEED  
US\$7 million**



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# What if... every child was in the picture?



## CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS: THE CASE FOR INVESTMENT

“ Now I have a birth certificate, I don't have a problem at school. Having a birth certificate also made it easier for my older brothers and sisters to find a job in the city.”

Lorena, 10, Masbate province

### The official birth registration rate in the Philippines is 91.5%.<sup>1</sup>

Registration has increased since the introduction of barangay (village) registration centres. However, in some regions it has remained low. In the autonomous region of Mindanao, for example, only 38 per cent of children are registered. Children from minority indigenous and Muslim communities, particularly girls, are least likely to be registered.

Registration is carried out locally through hospitals, health clinics and local government offices, and local birth certificates are issued by the local civil registrar. However, these aren't valid outside the municipality or city. Parents have to get a national birth certificate from the National Statistics Office to apply for social welfare benefits or to obtain a passport.

1. National Statistics Office, 2007

Children in rural areas who don't have a birth certificate are at risk of being trafficked to cities to work as domestic workers or in restaurants and bars, and girls in some areas are vulnerable to early marriage. Non-registration also makes it more difficult for children to enrol in and graduate from school and claim benefits from the government. In the aftermath of typhoon Haiyan, lack of registration made it even more difficult to reunite children with their families and made them more vulnerable to trafficking.

More than half of those responding to a study by Plan in 2011 said that high fees (up to US\$10 for late registration) and other costs (transport, overnight accommodation and bribery by officials) were the main reasons for not registering their child. This was followed by lack of awareness about the importance of birth registration.

**FUNDING NEED  
US\$300,000**

## Plan in action

With the National Statistics Office (NSO), we've registered 30,000 children from indigenous and Muslim communities. We've carried out awareness-raising campaigns about the importance of birth registration, trained local civil registrars and established or improved village civil registration systems in remote areas. Together with the NSO, we successfully lobbied for the legitimisation and protection of children born to single parents.

We're currently working with the Philippine Association of Civil Registrars and local government colleagues to improve civil registration systems at the local level and for the introduction of a Civil Registration Act to replace the outdated 1930 Civil Registration Law.

## The future

Our aim now is to achieve 100% registration in areas with low levels of registration by: providing information about the importance of birth registration in local languages; through mass registration events; and by supporting local governments to introduce digitised birth registration solutions, particularly in areas affected by typhoon Haiyan. We'll also be conducting a public campaign to support the enactment of a new Civil Registration Act.

**In order to significantly contribute to the goal of 100% registration, we need to raise US\$300,000, which will cover a period of three years.**



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# What if... every child was in the picture?



## CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS: THE CASE FOR INVESTMENT

“I’m happy because I’ve registered my child. Now Sabrina will have rights to her inheritance. Now her father cannot reject her.”

Theophila, 22, mother of eight-month-old Sabrina

**Although the births of 63% of children in Rwanda are registered – down nearly 20% since 2005 – only 6.6% of these children have a birth certificate.<sup>1</sup>**

When a child is born, parents have one month to notify the local registration centre of the birth and get a free birth certificate. After 30 days, parents have to pay a fee of \$US10 and many, having registered their child, cannot afford to get a birth certificate. There is also a general lack of awareness about the value and importance of having a birth certificate.

Without a birth certificate children are not allowed to take official examinations and are therefore more likely to drop out of school. This makes them more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, including early marriage, trafficking to work as sex workers in and out of Rwanda, working in dangerous jobs (such as mining) and being recruited into armed groups.

1. Rwanda Statistics Yearbook 2012

Among the children who are least likely to be registered are refugees from the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo and returnees who fled to Tanzania during the 1990s genocide. Children from poor rural or female-headed households are also less likely to be registered because in some rural areas the nearest registration centre is 20 kilometres away and mothers registering their children without the father often face discrimination.

## Government initiatives

Rwanda's 1998 civil code stipulated that parents had to register their children within 15 days of birth. This was extended to 30 days in 2008.

The government is currently amending existing legislation and has carried out awareness-raising campaigns, especially to encourage registration by single mothers. Each administrative centre now has an official in charge of registration and record keeping.

The government is also considering enabling health centres to issue birth certificates to avoid the long and expensive court process that currently operates.

Huge-scale investment in roads will make it easier for people to access registration centres, but there remains much to be done to ensure proper implementation of the law throughout the country.

## The future

Plan aims to launch a campaign to increase birth registration, particularly among refugee and other vulnerable children. This will include a national awareness-raising campaign (through, for example, radio, TV, and travelling music and theatre shows) on the importance of having a birth certificate, focusing particularly on refugee camps and in Bugesera, Gatsibo and Nyaruguru. Our aim is also to train district registrars and provide registration centres with equipment and materials such as ledgers, cupboards, bicycles and computers. And we'll be further encouraging the Government to extend the period for free registration and introduce digital birth registration to improve service delivery and record keeping.

**In order to achieve this, we need US\$320,000, which will cover a three-year period.**

1. 2011 Health and Demographic Survey

**FUNDING NEED**  
**US\$320,000**



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# What if... every child was in the picture?



## CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS: THE CASE FOR INVESTMENT

“ My father arranged for me to be married. My mother disagreed with the marriage and used my birth certificate to show local leaders that I was not old enough to be married.”

Kadie, 13

**Estimates for the number of children whose births are registered in Sierra Leone range from 51 to 78%.<sup>1</sup>**

There are no reliable statistics. Records are made manually, and there is no way to cross-check whether a person has been registered more than once. According to the law, district offices have to send records older than four years to the National Office of Births and Deaths Registry, where they run the risk of being lost or damaged.

1. Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey 2008 and Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2010



As well as killing, injuring and displacing thousands of people, Sierra Leone's decade-long civil war, which ended in 2002, left the country with practically no infrastructure – although this is gradually being restored. There's no transport system for the government to manage a country-wide birth registration operation and many district councils don't fully understand their roles or responsibilities in the process. Registration centres lack basic materials and equipment, and staff are not trained in record-keeping, which contributes to the inconsistency and unreliability of data.

Many parents find it too costly – in terms of both time and money – to register their children.

If they fail to register their baby within one month, they have to pay a fee ranging from US\$0.50 to \$1 and face a complicated and time-consuming process.

Minority and marginalised groups, such as children with disabilities, are least likely to be registered. This is partly due to cultural practices that don't necessarily fit with government regulations.

## Plan in action

Plan has been working to increase birth registration for a number of years and since 2012 has been piloting the government's universal birth registration project in three districts – Western Area, Porto Loko and Kailahun. We've carried out awareness-raising campaigns, held mass registration days, and provided equipment, materials and training for static and mobile registration centres. Nationally, we've carried out a review of the existing legal and policy framework and made proposals for the introduction of digital registration.

## The future

Over the next three years, Plan is aiming to build on current pilot projects to create a functioning, fully-equipped and sustainable civil registration and vital statistics system. Activities will include community mobilisation campaigns, linking government functions (for example, bringing registration to schools and linking it with vaccination programmes and maternity departments), training to sustain technical and financial sustainability, and supporting the government to establish a digital birth registration system.

**In order to achieve this, we need US\$1.1 million which will cover a three-year period.**

**FUNDING NEED**  
**US\$1.1 million**



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SUDAN



What if...  
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## CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS: THE CASE FOR INVESTMENT

“ In the past ... you had to travel to the town about 60 km from our village. We couldn't afford the transport on top of the cost of the certificate. Now the services are at our door step, we feel happy and relieved.”

Hanady, 27, who was able to register her daughter Hoyam at the local health centre following Plan's work with the Ministry of Health in White Nile State

**Officially the birth registration rate in Sudan is nearly 60%, up from nearly 33% in 2006.<sup>1</sup>**

However, the national average masks vast differences in registration rates between states, between the urban rich (85%) and rural poor (6%), and between children whose mothers are educated (80%) and those whose mothers are not (16%).

There are many reasons why parents don't – or can't – register their children: lack of awareness about the importance of birth certificates, lack of knowledge about how to go about registering their child, and the difficulty and time it takes for rural populations to reach registration centres. Although health centres can now register births, midwives often don't see it as part of their job as most aren't employed by the government. In any case, 80% of births take place at home. For many parents the cost of registration – between US\$2 and \$10, depending on the state – is simply too expensive.

National Ministry of Health and Central Bureau of Statistics (2011)  
Sudan Household Health Survey: Second Round Summary Report,  
Government of Sudan

Displaced and refugee children – of which there are many in Sudan – are especially difficult to register. These include children displaced by conflict in and around Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile states. In Darfur alone, there have been 400,000 new internally displaced people since January 2013.

## Government initiatives

In recent years the government has made considerable efforts to increase registration rates. With the support of Plan, UNICEF and other organisations, it has developed a national Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) strategy which aims to have achieved 90% registration by the end of 2016. The strategy includes a mass national awareness campaign – across all 18 states – creating demand, telling people they need to register and how to go about it. In 2013, the president also issued a decree stating that birth registration should be free in the first year after birth.

**FUNDING NEED  
US\$5 million**



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## Plan in action

Plan has been working to promote birth registration in Sudan for nine years. As well as training midwives and local registrars, we set up mobile registration teams in North Kordofan, Kassala and White Nile states and we're piloting digital registration in North Kordofan.

In 2012, we held two national workshops with UNICEF and the Ministry of Health to explore ways of overcoming barriers to registration. Recommendations from these workshops have been incorporated in the government's Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) strategy. They include: piloting the use of mobile phone technology to scale up registration; revising regulations to standardise implementation of civil registration law across all states; training civil registrars, health workers other government officials; and gathering information about successful CRVS systems in other countries.

## The future

Plan aims to continue supporting the government in implementing its CRVS strategy. This will include:

- supporting a national public awareness campaign by organising meetings with national decision-makers, supported by media and success stories showing the benefits of registration providing mobile registration teams in remote areas
- training local registrars and midwives
- replicating our pilot digital birth registration programme in five other districts of North Kordofan
- supporting the government's national roll-out of digital registration.

**In order to achieve this, we need US\$5 million, to cover a three-year period.**



# What if... every child was in the picture?



## CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS: THE CASE FOR INVESTMENT

“ I know how important birth certificates are for my children. I want them to be safe, whether I’m alive or no longer here.”

Debora, who got birth certificates for her three children at Plan’s one-stop registration programme in Kisarawe district

**Only 14% of children aged under-five are registered in mainland Tanzania<sup>1</sup> and, of these, only half have birth certificates.**

In rural areas the figure is even lower, with only 8 per cent of under-fives registered, of which only 2.6 per cent have birth certificates.

In most of the country, registration is a two-step process. Notifications of birth take place at health centres, either at birth or within 90 for babies born at home. Then parents have to take their children to the district administrative office and pay a fee to get a birth certificate. This takes time and costs money, which are two of the reasons why so few children have certificates.

1. 2010 Demographic and Health Survey

Children in remote, rural villages are least likely to have a birth certificate, along with children with disabilities and those from minority groups. If they are unable to prove their age and identity, children can be forced into early marriage, made to work in hazardous conditions or treated as adults in the criminal justice system.

## Government initiatives

As part of its 2011-15 birth registration strategy, the government has introduced a pilot scheme in five districts to integrate registration and certification into a one-step process. Legally recognised hand written birth certificates can now be issued at health centres and local government offices at village level. The government's Registration, Insolvency and Trusteeship Agency (RITA) has teamed up with TiGO, a private mobile phone company, to link data from village offices and health centres to a national database. The aim is to roll the scheme out nationally and increase the under-five registration rate to 50 per cent by 2015.

**FUNDING NEED  
US\$4.8 million**

## Plan in action

Plan has been working with the government to increase birth registration since 2006. We've trained district and local registrars, provided materials and equipment for registration offices and supported the introduction of one-stop registration in four districts. We've also held public awareness campaigns in the six districts where work and mobilised a coalition of civil society organisations which successfully pushed for the right to birth registration to be included in the 2009 Law of the Child.

## The future

Our plan is to support the government to implement its under-five birth registration strategy in two regions – Mwanza and Geita – where we already have programmes. We aim to do this by:

- increasing awareness about the importance of registration through civil society organisations, public meetings, media campaigns and schools
- training district, ward and village-level officials in registration processes and supporting the provision of equipment and materials such as registration books
- supporting the testing and improvement of soft and hardware for the collection of digital data
- facilitating connection of the two regions to the national data base using mobile phone technology
- working closely with RITA, UNICEF and other partners at national level.

**In order to achieve this, we need to raise US\$4.8 million, which will cover a period of five years.**



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# What if... every child was in the picture?



## CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS: THE CASE FOR INVESTMENT

“My friends always mocked me for not being Thai as I didn’t have a Thai ID card. I was angry about those insults, but what they said was true.”

Joe, 17, who was finally granted citizenship following Plan’s registration campaign in Chiang Rai, in the far north of Thailand

**Although the birth registration rate in Thailand is 95%,<sup>1</sup> this figure does not take into account an estimated 3.5 million migrants from neighbouring countries and one million people from minority ethnic groups living in remote rural areas.<sup>2</sup>**

Of the 40 different ethnic groups in Thailand, only nine are recognised as Thai citizens, despite most of them having lived in the country for generations. They can’t vote, own land, or travel outside their home provinces and children are often denied admission to public schools. Even those who are allowed to attend don’t get an official school-leaving certificate, without which they’re denied access to higher education, many forms of employment and state services such as healthcare. Lack of legal status also makes them more vulnerable to being trafficked, both within Thailand and to neighbouring countries.

1. [http://www.unicef.org/thailand/protection\\_14929.html](http://www.unicef.org/thailand/protection_14929.html)

2. International Organization for Migration, 2011, *Thailand Migration Report* <http://www.un.or.th/documents/tmr-2011.pdf> and Minority Rights, <http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=5608>

Most births can be registered relatively simply at a local registration office. But for those who are not recognised as Thai citizens, the process is complex and time consuming. Parents from minority groups who have gained citizenship as adults often have to prove their child is theirs through DNA testing, which is expensive and takes several months. Many don't speak Thai, which is an additional barrier.

## Plan in action

Together with government agencies, Plan has created a local government network to improve procedures for applying for and gaining citizenship at provincial level. We've initiated a ceremony involving local government for those whose legal status has been approved. A working committee on statelessness, which Plan is an active member of, promotes information sharing between government and NGOs on how best to support applicants to prepare their documents and make successful applications.

In 2013, we helped 1,400 people gain Thai nationality in the Fang and Mae Aye districts of Chiang Rai, and a further 8,800 to reach a point where they were ready to submit their applications. We work with the Ministry of Interior and Civil Society Organizations to build links between isolated communities and the government. We also train local partners, community leaders and volunteers to support stateless people through the application process, including by providing information in minority languages.

## The future

Our plans for the future include:

- setting up mobile legal clinics to raise awareness about the importance of registration and provide advice and support on the application process
- training local organisations, community leaders and volunteers in human rights law and in the law relating to citizenship and the application process, as well as in project management and research so that they can scale up activities in other areas
- raising public awareness of the importance of registration in protecting children, for example against trafficking.

**In order to achieve this, we need US\$2.9 million which will cover a three-year period.**

**FUNDING NEED  
US\$2.9 million**



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UGANDA



What if...  
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## CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS: THE CASE FOR INVESTMENT

“With this birth certificate, my husband’s clan knows the identity of my son and it will guarantee his right to succession. It has helped him enrol in primary school and it will help him get a passport if he wants to travel abroad in the future.”

Zainabu Nangobi after receiving a birth certificate for her seven-year-old son, Mugoya

**Overall, the births of 30% of Uganda’s children are registered.<sup>1</sup>**

This figure is up from 4 per cent in 2005, largely due to a mass public awareness campaign and the introduction of a two-tier system, whereby ‘short’ birth certificates can be issued by designated registrars at government hospitals and local government offices. However, the national figure masks large differences in registration rates between different regions and between rich urban and poor rural communities. Although ‘short’ certificates feed into national statistics and can be used, for example, to enrol children in school, they’re not always accepted in legal cases or when seeking a passport. Full, legally recognised birth certificates costing US\$5 are only issued at the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs in Kampala, which is too far and too expensive to reach for many remote communities, especially since it requires more than one visit.

1. 2011 Uganda Demographic Health Survey



Children who aren't registered and can't prove their age or identity are at greater risk of early marriage, trafficking, and being recruited to work as domestic workers (where they are vulnerable to sexual abuse) and in sugar plantations. There are also large numbers of children living on the streets of Kampala and other cities. A birth certificate can help protect these children, especially when they come into conflict with the law.

Children in remote areas of the country and particular groups – such as the Batwa in western Uganda and pastoral communities in Karamoja – are least likely to be registered due to geographical and cultural factors. Uganda is also home to thousands of refugees from the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo who cannot register their children.

**FUNDING NEED  
US\$5 million**



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## Government initiatives

In 2005, the government amended the 1973 Birth Registration Act to improve the registration process. It established a new Ugandan Registration Services Bureau and appointed a Registrar General, with designated registrars at district and sub-county levels. However, the latter can only issue 'short' certificates.

## Plan in action

From 2004 to 2011, Plan was a member of a birth registration task force. We took part in a mass public awareness campaign, producing posters and radio programmes, and also issued free 'short' birth certificates in the six districts where we have programmes.

## The future

Plan aims to support the government's strategic plan, which it committed to at the Pan-African Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Kampala in September 2013.

The goal is to increase birth registration to 90% over the next five years. Our work will involve collaborating with the government in simplifying and decentralising the registration process, removing the two-tier system, and setting up digital registration in the districts where we work. We're also campaigning for birth registration to be free.

**In order to achieve this, we need to raise US\$5 million, which will cover a period of five years.**

ZAMBIA



# What if... every child was in the picture?



## CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS: THE CASE FOR INVESTMENT

“ My birth certificate protected me from child marriage and helped me to get a national identity card while I was at a boarding school.”

Miriam, 18

**The official birth registration rate in Zambia is just 17%<sup>1</sup> – up from 10% in 2006, but still one of the lowest in the world.**

In some rural areas, particularly in the Northern and Eastern provinces, very few children are registered because of the long distances people have to travel to reach registration centres. Also, many parents aren't aware of the importance of birth registration.

Groups least likely to be registered include children with disabilities, those displaced by flood or drought and children in refugee camps. Refugees from Angola, who have been living in camps for years, have had their refugee status removed and are therefore stateless.

1. 2010 National Census

Girls who can't prove their age or identity are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation, being trafficked – from rural to urban areas or to South Africa, the USA, China and Europe – and early marriage. Although the legal age for marriage is 16 with parental consent, 42 per cent of girls are married earlier, many as young as 13 or 14. Abandoned children who can't prove their age or identity also have problems getting maintenance or their inheritance, for example, if their father denies paternity.

Birth certificates are currently issued by the National Registration Office in the capital, Lusaka, and in some health facilities in three other provinces. Even after children have been registered there are often long delays before a birth certificate is issued.

**FUNDING NEED  
US\$1.6 million**

## Plan in action

Between 2006 and 2011, Plan supported the National Registration Office by providing financial and technical support. We also produced radio programmes and educational materials promoting birth registration, especially in rural communities. After negotiating with traditional leaders and village chiefs, we supported the registration process in local villages in the areas where we work.

## The future

Plan is now keen to support the government's National Action Plan, drawn up by the National Statistics Office and other agencies, which involves setting up a national civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) system to improve registration rates across the country. With the Ministries of Education, Community Development, Health and Social Welfare, we will also be encouraging schools, orphanages, health centres and sports facilities to promote birth registration. We will support awareness raising and capacity building among government and non-governmental staff, and the establishment of local registration points, for example, in rural hospitals and health centres. Plan will also encourage the use of accelerated birth registration initiatives by supporting the development of a digital registration and data collection system linked to a national databank.

**In order to achieve this Plan will need to raise US\$1.6 million, which will cover a period of four years**



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## DIGITAL BIRTH REGISTRATION

As part of Plan's Count Every Child initiative, the Digital Birth Registration (DBR) programme helps governments to improve birth registration rates and extend the reach of registration through the appropriate use of technology and strengthened civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems.

DBR is an innovative programme which builds on Plan's global experience of birth registration by using digital technologies (including mobile phones) to register births. This approach can reduce the considerable barriers to registration still seen in many countries:

- large distances between communities and registration centres
- high costs of travel, accommodation and loss of earnings when registering a child
- complicated paper-based processes and bureaucracy.

DBR aims to get the full value from technology, providing the technical expertise and methodology to ensure that digital solutions are appropriate for the country context and strengthen national CRVS systems as a whole. Technology is used within an integrated programme that also addresses legal frameworks, public awareness and improved service provision – as digitised systems alone cannot bring about increased birth registration rates.

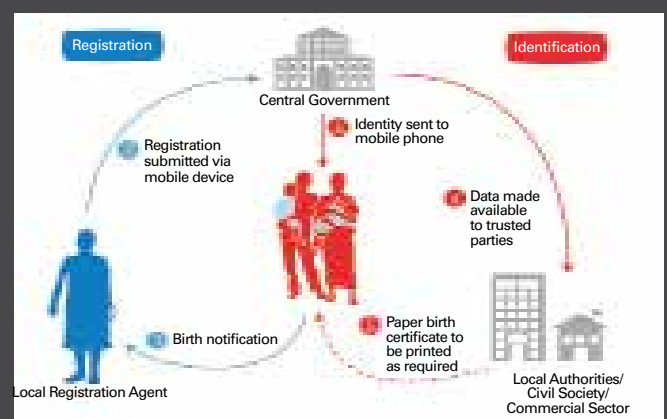
### What is a typical DBR process?

DBR uses a decentralised network of registration agents for the notification of births in the local community. Birth data is captured using mobile phones or web-based tools and is sent to a central database within the national civil registration system where it can be viewed and validated by a national / district registrar.

Once a baby is registered, the identity of the child is created within the central civil registration system which can then be sent to the parent's mobile phone (in the form of a mobile identity).

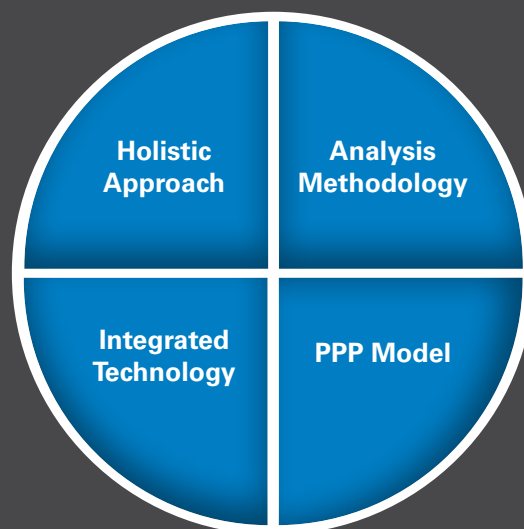
This process allows the parent to register their child within their community and hold a form of identity for the child shortly after birth.

The civil registration system is able to provide birth data to health, population and statistics systems at the national level.



## How is Plan's approach different?

- Plan takes a **holistic approach** to birth registration within the context of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics
- DBR uses a best practice **analysis methodology** to ensure technologies are appropriate to the country context (the DBR Analysis Phase)
- Plan facilitates partnerships between the **public and private sectors** that reinforce early partner engagement and commitment
- **Technology is integrated** within programmes that also address legal frameworks, public awareness and improved service provision



## What are the potential benefits of DBR?

1. Increased birth registration rates, particularly for those who are marginalised or live in remote areas
2. Provision of identity shortly after birth for improved citizenship and inclusion
3. Strengthened CRVS systems
4. Accurate population data to support service planning, with a focus on equity and inclusion
5. Improved vital statistics for planning, measuring and monitoring progress of development

## DBR funding requirements

The DBR Analysis Phase has already started in Kenya, Sierra Leone and Pakistan. We are now working to initiate DBR programmes in an additional 11 countries (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Indonesia, Laos, Malawi, Mozambique, Philippines, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia).

**In order to develop and implement DBR we need to raise a total of UP TO US\$3.1 MILLION PER COUNTRY**

The DBR Analysis Phase takes six months and produces a detailed feasibility assessment and full programme blueprint.

**UP TO US\$100,000 PER COUNTRY**

The DBR Implementation Phase takes three years end to end, including six months of post-implementation evaluation. DBR is a fully scalable and national solution initially implemented in selected regions with a population of up to one million. The outputs include registering the births of over 50,000 newborn babies (plus 25,000 births every year thereafter), training more than 200 registration agents, and delivering a model and roadmap for scaling up DBR nationally.

**UP TO US\$3 MILLION PER COUNTRY**



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For more information contact the DBR Project Manager, Edward Duffus ([edward.duffus@plan-international.org](mailto:edward.duffus@plan-international.org)).

To make people count,  
you first need to be able  
to count people.

Despite its potential benefits, over 100 developing countries do not have well-functioning civil registration and vital statistics systems.

Unless this issue receives immediate and concerted attention by governments, donors and development partners the continued cost of neglect of these systems could detract from both human and economic development.

Plan is therefore calling for investment in effective, comprehensive and rights-based civil registration and vital statistics systems, that include every child's right to birth registration.



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